

NORDEUROPAforum

Zeitschrift für Politik,

Wirtschaft und Kultur

ISSN 1863639X

1/2003

13. Jahrgang (6. der N.F.)

Seiten 107-109

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Salmon, Patrick and Tony Barrow (eds.): *Britain and the Baltic. Studies in Commercial, Political and Cultural Relations 1500–2000*. Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2003.

This book is not only ambitious in the time period covered, but also in the range of themes that it seeks to address: war and trade, assimilation and identities, and international security. Drawing upon papers presented at the conference *Britain and the Baltic: East Coast Connections* (1999), this edited volume presents an eclectic mixture of case studies on: trade between East-coast British ports and Baltic ports (John D. Fudge; Jerzy Litwin; Adrian Osler; David Aldridge; Bill Purdue; Chris Evans, Åsa Eklund and Göran Rydén); the patronage networks of Scottish merchants and ministers and the impact of small British commercial, military and diplomatic communities in the Swedish Empire and Prussian ports (Steve Murdoch; Leos Müller; Enn Küng; Martin Åberg); Swedish privateering (Lars Ericson); British naval and war-time policies in the region (Andrew Lambert; Lutz Oberdörfer; Antonijs Zunda); links between Anglican and Lutheran churches (Nicholas Hope); Poland's NATO aspirations (Kaare Dahl Martinsen); accounts of British ambassadors on Denmark (Jørgen Sevaldsen); and a comparative study of post World War II culture and society in Newcastle and Malmö (Natasha Vall).

However, it is clear that the main theme in this volume is Britain's 'great power' naval policy and marine trade in the Baltic Sea region, pleasantly interspersed with accounts of British, predominantly Scottish, communities located in the region and their influence upon 'local' life in the cities in which they settled. In this regard, Steve Murdoch's account of the sizeable Scottish commercial, military and diplomatic communities in the Swedish Empire of the early Seventeenth century and Martin Åberg's study of the 'anglophiling' influence of the comparatively small British middle-class communities in western Sweden move smoothly between individual biographies and more general trends.

The book makes one aware that British interests in the Baltic Sea were initially concentrated in its south-eastern corner, before moving northwards in the Seventeenth century. The chapters documenting the period from 1500–1650 suggest that British trading interests and communities were closely linked with the Prussian/Polish port of Danzig/Gdansk in the south-eastern corner of the region at this time. According to Jerzy Litwin, Gdansk remained "the principal Baltic port of destination for British ships until the second partition of Poland in 1793" (p. 59). Yet, when discussing the Memel crisis of the 1920s, Lutz Oberdörfer states that "the region south of the Baltic Sea was not an area of traditional British interest or concern" (p. 50).

Andrew Lambert neatly demonstrates the degree to which Britain's navy 'ruled the Baltic waves' in the period from 1890–1914, while Antonijs Zunda illustrates its post-WWI demise and the increasing influence that the emerging 'superpowers' had on British decisions regarding the question of recognising the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic States in World War II. Several contributions chart the rise and fall of Britain as a 'Baltic Sea power'.

It seems strange to include a chapter on Poland and NATO in this collection that has little reference to war, trade or identity in either Britain or the Baltic. Kaare Dahl Martinsen's chapter is an interesting account of Poland's attempt to balance Euro-Atlantic aspirations and relations with its eastern neighbours in the 1990s, but it seems out of place even in a collection of articles this diverse and wide-ranging.

One of the most fascinating chapters, from a British or Danish perspective at least, is the contribution of Jørgen Sevaldsen. He provides an interesting comparison of a book published in 1992 by the former British ambassador to Denmark Sir James Mellon (1983–6), with *An Account of Denmark as it was in the Year 1692*, written by a Seventeenth Century British ambassador Robert Molesworth. The different receptions that the books received in the ambassador's home state and former posting are of interest, as Sevaldsen suggests, they give insights into the societies of both Britain and Denmark. In this regard, he argues that Mellon uses Denmark "as a warning example of the kind of society Britain could become if the process of 'decline' continued and Britain lost its global influence. As 'another Denmark', Britain would still be a civilised society, but an inward-looking and unglamorous one without a sense of mission in the world" (p. 332). In other words, Britain would move to the 'world periphery', just as other former Baltic powers have.

Of course, to describe Britain as a 'Baltic power' is not fashionable today. As David Kirby explains in the preface 'Locating the Baltic', the Baltic is often confused with the Balkans in Britain, and "this low level of public awareness may reflect the relatively un-newsworthy status of the Baltic, which in these times of strife and trouble is undoubtedly a good thing; but it may also indicate how the Baltic has slipped out of the general ambit of British public life in the course of the [twentieth] century" (p. xvii). Therefore, to say that this collection filled a gap would be an understatement. At the same time, however, and despite the quality of several of the chapters, it is unlikely to reverse the trend that has seen the Baltic disappear from British public life, although that is not to say that attempts are not being made to revive interest and contacts between the Baltic and parts of Britain – with the north-eastern corner of England at the fore.

Paul D. Holtom